



# Forward Thinking

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The newsletter of CHANGING ATTITUDE

December 2010



## Bishop sticks head above parapet

In an article published in the Church Times on 29 October, Stephen Platten, the Bishop of Wakefield, wondered when most diocesan synods last sought a presentation from gay Christians about their life in Christ, or dioceses last held day conferences on sexuality and faith. This is daring thinking at the moment in the Church of England, challenging the silence that has befallen the Listening Process.

Bishop Stephen's thoughts arose from an invitation to attend, with a colleague, a meeting of Gay and Lesbian Youth at a secret venue in Calderdale. Half-a-dozen people made presentations aimed, particularly, at the Christian churches. Some elements of the conference presentation shocked the bishop. The young people described how gay children are bullied at school, rejected by parents on the basis of sexual orientation, and are subjected to severe violence in the streets and even in schools. The result of all this, he was told, is utter isolation for many, higher rates of mental-health disorders, suicidal behaviour, self-harm, substance misuse, and homelessness. Shortly after his visit, Bishop Stephen's experience was intensified by the news from the United States of four separate suicides in a month of teenagers who had killed themselves because of bullying by classmates.

After the evening in Halifax he wondered whether the Church of England had even begun to listen to LGBT people. He did not feel that he had listened to any serious degree, at least not to gay people outside the Church. What, he wondered, would it mean *really* to listen?

With great honesty he admits that in his diocese they have begun to listen, but only just. They have debated how the Bible can inform moral decisions, including those on sexuality, and have listened to a presentation on friendship. Both encounters were worthwhile and conducted with enormous grace.

Bishop Stephen says that the Church of God should take a lead; it ought to encourage real listening, allowing for the possibility of a change of heart, if not a change in our own moral outlook. We all have a responsibility to break down homophobia. One young woman told him that the visit had changed her attitude to the church. If more Christians sat down with gay people they, too, would find stereotypes breaking down.

A healthy society and a healthy Church will be both sensitive to all and responsible in deriving a moral code that promotes human flourishing. At the moment, it does not feel like that for lesbian and gay people. It is too late for the churches to take a lead, but not too late to start listening more intently. We hope Bishop Stephen will take to the House of Bishops his ideas for presentations at diocesan synods by LGBT people and diocesan day conferences on sexuality and faith.

In many small ways that the Holy Spirit will surely use, the Kingdom of God came a little closer. How interesting that "they" welcomed the church in ways that the church doesn't welcome "them."  
(See page 6 for a report on Leeds Pride.)

# LGBT marriage and blessings in church

- an overview of the current situation,  
by Colin Coward.



Civil Partnerships for lesbian and gay couples were introduced at the end of 2005 and, quite quickly, the majority of people began to refer to the Partnerships as 'marriage'. The contract which lesbian and gay couples make with each other in a civil partnership and the pattern of life they create together looks to people like a marriage. But many churches disagree, same-gender relationships are not marriages, say some Christian denominations.

There is a deepening division in the Church of England: many same-gender couples would like to have their relationships and civil partnerships blessed and celebrated in church and to marry when the law allows, a desire which is supported by *Changing Attitude*.

*Changing Attitude* believes that the Preface to the Marriage Service in 'Common Worship' enshrines the holy relationships which lesbian and gay Christian couples wish to honour and celebrate in church. We are advocating freedom for those who wish to marry in church and for those who wish to have their relationships blessed following a secular civil partnership or marriage.

## Bishop Richard Harries

Bishop Richard, a patron of *Changing Attitude*, commented that "it seems to me clear from a Christian point of view that a ceremony in which two people commit themselves to a faithful, lifelong relationship before witnesses partakes of the nature of a marriage. As such, from a Christian point of view, it can also express the biblical

truth that such a relationship reflects the undeviating faithfulness of God towards us and which..... has its prototype in the relationship of Christ to his church. Far from undermining the

institution of marriage, civil partnerships witness to its abiding importance. What is undermining marriage in our society is promiscuity, about which people seem ready even to boast."

## The South African Anglican model

The Anglican Church of Southern Africa offers some guidance: in 2007 its bishops said. "The blessing of a union or partnership is regarded as the equivalent of solemnizing a marriage." A blessing serves to "underline the fact that that which has already been done by God is good. When we bless, we therefore acknowledge through an act of thanksgiving what already exists in God. In this regard we are as yet uncertain as to the application of this understanding to same-sex partnerships."

## Lord Alli's amendment

Lord Alli's amendment to the Equality Bill seeks to allow faith communities the freedom to set legal ceremonies in a religious context, something the Quakers, Liberal Jews, and Unitarians want. His amendment is now being revised into a form which should return to parliament in 2011. As conservative Christians feared, the amendment has opened a Pandora's box of expectations and proposals. Equal marriage rights have moved sharply up the agenda for LGBT people during the first months of the new Coalition Government which supports granting freedom for civil partnerships to be contracted in religious premises.

## Gay marriage poll shows majority want equal marriage rights

*Pink News* polled almost 800 readers and found that the vast majority want equal marriage rights:



## Gay marriage continued



98% agreeing that marriage laws should be gender-neutral. 77% agreed that the law should give all couples the choice of civil partnerships or marriage. 23% said that marriage should be the only form of recognition for couples. The poll provides clear evidence that the huge majority of LGBT people want marriage equality. A significant issue for Changing Attitude is the cruelty of forcing married transgender people to divorce their partners in order to be legally recognised in their new gender.

### Liberal Democrats support marriage and civil partnership equality

Liberal Democrat party-leader Nick Clegg has said: "I support gay marriage. Love is the same, straight or gay, so the civil institution should be the same too. All couples should be able to make that commitment to one another".

### Peter Tatchell of OutRage! campaigns for equality

Peter Tatchell has argued consistently that equality for LGBT people is the number one issue - heterosexual people should be free to contract a civil partnership and LGBT people free to marry. He argues that: "This is an issue of equality. In a democratic society, we are all supposed to be equal under the law. The bans on

same-gender civil marriage and on heterosexual civil partnerships are not equality. They are discrimination".

### Stonewall finally agree

At the end of October, after months of pressure from other gay campaigners and several of its co-founders Stonewall is lobbying for religions to be given the option of holding marriages if they wish, in the same way that faiths will soon be able to choose whether to hold civil partnerships - a permissive option as a matter of religious freedom.

### Civil Partnership statistics

Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that 6,281 gay couples, 3,227 male and 3,054 female, had civil partnerships in the UK in 2009, a fall of 12% on 2008. Since 2005 and the end of 2009 a total of 40,237 LGBT couples had civil partnerships. The number of ceremonies peaked in 2006 and has declined after the initial rush. In 2009, 351 civil partnership dissolutions were granted. In 2008, 180 couples dissolved their civil partnerships.

Same-gender marriage now exists in Canada, Argentina, South Africa, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland.

## Dramatis Personae



Stonewall



Lord Alli



Richard Harries



Peter Tatchell



Nick Clegg

## Jeffrey John - an alternative perspective

By The Rev'd Benny Hazlehurst, founder of Accepting Evangelicals

Once again Jeffrey John has been in the spotlight as a potential bishop. Merely the prospect of this is likely to result in controversy in the debate over sexuality. In such situations the first casualty is often any sense of the real person and of the good fruit in their ministry which has led them to be considered for senior appointment. I have known Jeffrey John for almost thirty years and, although a committed Evangelical, I have nothing but respect for his ministry and vocation. Jeffrey was my college chaplain at Brasenose College, Oxford; despite our differences I found him an inspiring preacher who clearly longed for people to grow in love of God and we worked together on several projects. The man I encountered was a deeply devout minister of the Gospel who faithfully spoke the words of Jesus with a conviction that was contagious.



Our paths did not cross again for some years, until he was a vicar in south-east London and I had the bishop's license to encourage outreach in housing estates. Jeffrey invited me to work with his church and in his parish. Over the time I was there I saw a growing church of people hungry to know more of God and keen to be part of God's mission. They were there in large part by reason of Jeffrey's ministry.

I was looking for a spiritual director and asked Jeffrey to do this. Also around this time he began to be more open about his sexuality but what I saw again and again was the fruit of his ministry. As controversy began to grow the words of Jesus kept coming to mind, "By their fruit you will know them" (Matt 7:16). It was this 'good fruit' that began to challenge my own evangelical understanding of homosexuality.

Then, in April 2003, my wife was dragged under the wheels of an eighteen-ton truck near to our home. I got to the scene just as the first ambulance crews arrived and sat next to her on the tarmac for the next two hours as they stabilised her enough to be airlifted to hospital. During the next few months her life was frequently in the balance and the strain of supporting her, while caring for our young children, and continuing to run a busy parish took their toll.

I was angry with God, feeling abandoned, hurt, and betrayed. When I was falling apart under the physical, emotional, spiritual strain the person who did most to hold me together was my spiritual director, Jeffrey John. He prayed for me, and with me, when I couldn't pray. At times – when I was unable to – he held on to God *for me*, and ministered Christ to me in the midst of all the pain, confusion, and despair. Ironically, while holding my life together, his life was falling apart, following his appointment as Bishop of Reading. At the very time he was supporting me, he had become the focus of the media's all-seeing eye, chased by journalists, torn apart by half the church, and held up to be hit again by the other half. When he was unable to go home because of the press camped outside his door and some bishops were writing letters opposing his consecration - at that very time, he was listening to me, praying with me, crying alongside me, being Christ to me, as my wife lay in a side room with septicaemia, fighting for life. The incongruence – the injustice – of this juxtaposition was not lost on me. 'By their fruit you will know them' came to my mind again and again.

We would do well to remember that at the centre of this is a child of God, a man who has a passion for seeing people strengthened in their faith in Christ, and the pastoral heart to sit with them through pain and suffering to hold them close to God. Such are the marks of Christ and they do not deserve to be ignored, forgotten, or pushed aside in controversies over doctrine, culture, or Biblical interpretation.

Jesus was, of course silent on the issue of homosexuality but was very clear in the way we should treat each other. In John's Gospel, "Love each other as I have loved you" was his last command before he went to the cross. Let us hope and pray that this Christ-like love will characterise our words and actions more in these days than it has in the past.

## Same-gender relationships: a celibate's perspective.

### Sister Rosemary CHN

As both a vowed Religious Sister and a trustee of Changing Attitude, I often feel that I am being forced to fight on two fronts.

On the one hand, I am campaigning for the right of lesbian and gay people to form committed partnerships, sexually expressed, and for the church to recognise and bless such unions, in opposition to Christians who insist that sexual abstinence is the only course open to people of this orientation (though they would not prescribe such deprivation for anyone else, and certainly not for themselves).

On the other, I need to defend voluntary celibacy as a valid way of life, against the prevailing cultural assumption of our time, shared also by most LGBT people, that lifelong sexual abstinence is necessarily inhuman and intolerable.

I do not myself see any conflict between my two campaigns. The link between them is the love of God. "Herein is love: not that we loved God, but that God loved us." God loves us all, without distinction, and Christians are among those who have recognised this and are responding to this love.

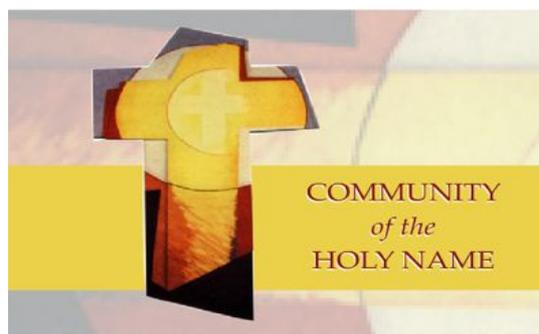
We experience and receive God's love both directly and through people who love us. For those called to celibacy, God's direct address to us is primary and central, which is why the sense of desolation which Mother Teresa, for example, experienced is so devastating. For those not in this situation, God's love may be communicated more often and more obviously through other people – and especially through *the* other person: the chosen life-partner. Being loved teaches us to love, and the love of God can shine out from within a good marriage or a good partnership. It is not the sex of the partners that matters, but the quality of the relationship. Love of this kind is not just about pleasure and mutual delight, though it contains these things, and it is right to celebrate them; love that lasts and grows requires faithfulness, perseverance, self-denial and sacrifice, and so reflects God's love for us.

The experts on same-sex relationships are those who live in them. Those of us who are celibate and/or straight need to begin by listening to the experience of those who know what they are talking about. Equally, we all need to try to appreciate the feelings of those not of our sex. When we have listened, and done our best to understand, then it is our turn to contribute on the basis of what we have come to know of God, our observation of others and our own experience of managing relationships, and our insights from the Bible and Christian tradition (which themselves are derived from the experience of people of earlier times). Same-sex relationships can be blundering and messy and, in some cases, selfish, irresponsible, abusive, and toxic. So can heterosexual relationships but that does not lead us to ban marriage. In a heterosexual context, the way we try to help people avoid bad relationships is to encourage good ones. That is why we have relationship education for young people, marriage preparation, and marriage counselling. But we seem to expect LGB people to form and sustain partnerships without any social or religious support and judge them harshly when they come to grief. Such cruelty, however 'Christian' its label, shows no mark of the love of God.

Everything we hear, or think, or say, or act on, must be judged by the standard we have received:

· *"God is love, and whoever abides in love*  
· *abides in God, and God abides in them."*

*"A new commandment I give to you,  
that you love one another as I have  
loved you."*



# Leedspride

By Jack Parkes Doorman, priest.

I went to Leeds Pride last year and, apart from my younger daughter, I saw no one I knew. I milled about aimlessly in Millennium Square and wondered where was the overt Christian presence: this would have been a welcoming and supportive Christian presence as opposed to the condemnatory sort.

This year Changing Attitude had a stall and were fully intending to march in the parade. I thought I'd go and offer my moral support. It is to me an issue of witness and personal integrity. My fear was that the church would indeed be there - or at least a faction of it - in full protest overdrive.

Was it possible that the face of the church, which is inclusive and accepting of all God's people in our brokenness, could make an appearance at this event and be welcomed by those who may for very good reasons be quite antagonistic towards us because of all the crap that they have had handed out by the church over the last few years? Would people take us on about the church and give us a probably well deserved hard time because of their own experiences of pain and rejection at the hands of the church?

The problem with that, of course, is how does a straight man make that part of his principles clear? "Good to see you vicar. Does your church not have a problem with an openly gay priest?" is the sort of question that is hard to unpack without it sounding like special pleading while a dozen transvestites totter past on totally unsuitable heels as a distraction.

Steve, had begun to unravel the banners he and Colin had brought with them. I took the end of a purple Changing Attitude banner bearing the legend "Christians together at Pride." Steve seemed to be wrestling with a larger red banner which, as it came free, proclaimed "Some Christians are gay: get over it." I liked that. It was confronting in a slightly stropy way. Nevertheless I was pleased I was



under the "safer" purple banner which, on reflection, was silly as I wouldn't have thought twice about marching under a banner that said "Some Christians are black: get over it" or some Christians are women...."

It was about five minutes before we set off when a former student of mine accosted me and demanded a hug. "I bet you never knew I was gay Sir." "Well, Ryan, about that. Let's just say I was half expecting to see you here." "I can't tell you how pleased I am to see the clergy here. Really, really pleased." one young man said to our little group with a smile as broad as you can imagine.

And then we were off. We got in just after the huge rainbow flag carried by about thirty people and the open lorry with its fancy-dressed passengers and mobile. The city seemed to be pulsating with the carnival atmosphere. There was no opposition; no cat-calls; no rudeness; no name-calling; no unpleasantness of any description - just crowds of people who had come for (or just stopped to watch) the spectacle.



Back at the stalls and displays Steve and members of his congregation did sterling work promoting All Hallows Church. They were selling rainbow candles and a variety of badges but at the same time, with some very slick marketing I thought, were giving out Changing Attitude and All Hallows leaflets. A lot of people - and I mean a lot - were interested. And there were more expressions of pleasure in our being there. Everyone was incredibly welcoming and positive.

I suspect the start of term could bring some interesting conversations. Within fifteen minutes an ex-colleague and three more sixth-formers passed by and stopped for a chat but I felt things were starting to get really crazy when a group of my year 9 and 10 students breezed up to me in full rainbow face-paint and greeted me enthusiastically. "Sir, Sir, we need a photo." Colin obliged: me and the quartet of students. There's a picture for the School newsletter.

All in all it was a great day. There were no Leviticites with their gospel of hate. In many small ways that the Holy Spirit will surely use, the Kingdom of God came a little closer. How interesting that "they" welcomed the church in ways that the church doesn't welcome "them."



## Birmingham Pride



birmingham  
**pride** 2010

This year we collected nearly a hundred messages from the general public for the Archbishop of Canterbury. Random passers-by, including LGBT people, families and friends wrote their messages on post-it notes.

Here is a selection:

As a person brought up Pentecostalist, I was told to kill myself.

What does the church recommend that parents of LGBT offspring should do? Should I say to my gay son – God gives unconditional love to your brother and sister because they are heterosexual but, unfortunately for you, God's love is *conditional* upon your remaining celibate? What should parents teach their children about the *unconditional* nature of the love of God?

Organised religion should embrace not repel

Don't forget that if Jesus was here he would have come to Pride and sat and made us feel valued

I would treasure it if the church would accept me and my partner. We are both female but love each other with our whole heart and souls. We feel unwelcome in churches because of this. Our love is no less than that of a man and woman. Please accept this

Stick to your principles. Don't pander to the evangelicals

I came out to my parish vicar. He told me to leave the consecrated grounds of the church and never to darken its doorways again. The church then preaches and teaches love, tolerance and inclusion whilst this happens. What I don't understand is this: how can I know that God loves me if this is how His church behaves?

As a practising Baptist, I'm proud my son can admit he is gay

Jesus had two dads. Why can't I?

It is not for the church to decide who is in and who is out. In the Good News, *all* are welcomed by Christ himself – regardless of sexuality, race or gender. This applies to our congregations as well as our clergy! It is time the church lived the gospel and moved to full inclusion of all: men, women, gay, straight, trans-gender, disabled, refugee, divorcee, single parent. This is our true calling.

I'm gay but too scared to go back to my local church

Are we a price worth paying for the unity of your church?

# I Have a Dream

(inspired by the late Martin Luther King Jr)

Elaine, a trustee of Changing Attitude, wrote this from her perspective as a transgendered person, based on her

**Dear Friends.....Dear Sisters.....Dear Family,**

I am happy to join with you today to celebrate the different journeys we have travelled, and the good things we have experienced along the way.

When I look back over the years, I see how much our community has changed and developed. Hopefully we understand ourselves better now, who we are and how we came to be here.

I rejoice in the freedom we have found in accepting ourselves just as we are, not pretending to be people we are not.

I rejoice in the fellowship and trust we have found in one another, even though we don't always see eye to eye.

I rejoice too and am grateful for wives and partners, families and friends, who have stuck by us, tolerated and supported us as much as they could, and above all loved us, in spite of our being different.

I rejoice in the richness of life that our situation has given, even though problems and difficulties have sometimes overshadowed the positive things.

And I rejoice that we live in a land where the Law protects us, rather than prosecutes us, and where we are not in constant fear of our lives.

Yes, dear sisters, we have so much to be thankful for, and we celebrate that today. But whilst we can be proud of where we have come to, we should not become euphoric. Let us remember that for some of us the picture is not rosy, where guilt, shame, remorse and deceit take hold of us, and where loneliness and despair are never far away. Secrecy becomes a way of life and the fear of discovery preoccupies us. It is sad to say that for some of our community the sense of peace and wholeness never comes.

And yet.....and yet.....there is hope..... We should not accept the status quo, and I believe we must speak out on behalf of our community.

My friends, I **have a dream....** that one day our people will walk the streets of this land without fear of abuse, attack or ridicule.

I **have a dream....** that one day we can all be open and honest with our partners, our families, our friends and our work colleagues, without any fear of discrimination or rejection; where those around us accept us as the people we are, without embarrassment or confusion.

I **have a dream** that one day all of us will be free of negative feelings about ourselves, and will be able to stand up proudly for who and what we are.

**Yes, I have a dream today!**

My friends, does this sound impossible? Do you feel it will never happen in our lifetime? Maybe you're right. But let's look towards the horizon, to a world which those who come after us will inhabit. Let's hope and dream that their world will be a better one than ours. Let's hope and dream that they will not have to endure the difficulties and traumas that many of us have had to experience. But how can we bring this about? Will it just happen on its own? Do we sit back, wait and watch? Or should we play our part by encouraging those we meet in our day to day lives to travel along what I have called the 'Road to Acceptance'?

I believe that together and as individuals we can. It is my hope and prayer that *even in our lifetimes* we will see positive changes in our culture, where our special community will be recognized as part of the diversity of life, a community that can make its own unique and positive contribution to society. Together we can make this world a better place, where all people of diversity will be respected and affirmed.

**This, dear friends, is my dream.**

Elaine Sommers © 2010



# Fostering ban

A former vicar has been banned from fostering children after refusing to allow gay couples in his home. John and Colette Yallop, of Blackburn, Lancashire, applied to be foster parents but told the local council that having gay couples in their home could harm their family life.

It is usual for prospective adoptive parents to visit foster carers for the handover process before children are found new homes. The couple claimed that their five-year-old daughter and seven-year-old son would be confused by a same-sex couple and they did not want to answer their children's questions on the issue.

Mr Yallop said: 'We are not homophobic and have worked alongside gay people, but we believe inviting gay couples into our home for the handover process might be detrimental to our family life and our young children. "Even if we disagree with the rights of gay couples to adopt because it goes against our Christian beliefs, it doesn't make us bad foster parents." He said he told social workers he would allow a single gay person into his home or would agree to handovers with gay couples taking place at a children's centre instead.

Mr Yallop admitted he was "no saint", after having to resign as a Church of England minister for cheating on his first wife. But he said that twenty years as a vicar and his work to help mentally-ill people would make him a good foster parent.

The couple received a letter from Lancashire County Council telling them their application to foster was being terminated by reason of their views.

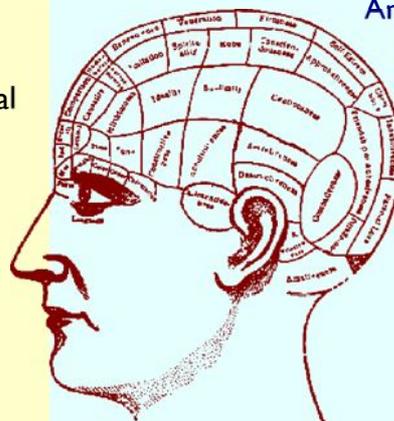
The couple are expected to appeal against the decision and are being assisted by the Christian Legal Centre, which frequently represents Christians accused of homophobic discrimination. Andrea Minichiello Williams, director of the Centre, said: 'We will be supporting John and Colette Yallop in legal action. "It is vital that as Christians we are allowed to live out our faith in public and not be eliminated from this kind of vital community work due to oppressive equalities legislation."

# Doctors declare conservative Christian 'gay cure' therapies harmful

The annual meeting of the British Medical Association meeting in Brighton on 1st July condemned forms of therapy designed to 'heal' gay and bisexual people of their attraction to members of their own sex. More than two-thirds of doctors present backed a call for the Royal College of Psychiatrists and other mental health standard-setting bodies to reject the treatments and ban their use through codes of practice. Health departments should also investigate alleged cases of conversion therapy being funded by the NHS, the meeting agreed. Research published last year found that a sixth of registered British therapist and psychiatrists have attempted to "cure" patients of homosexuality.

Tom Dolphin, the proposer of the motion and the vice-chair of the BMA's junior doctors committee, said: "Sexuality is such a fundamental part of who a person is that attempts to change it just result in significant confusion, depression, and even suicide. You can't just wish away same-sex attraction no matter how inconvenient it might be." But Cardiff consultant neurophysiologist Gareth Payne said there was no "gold standard" evidence that conversion therapy did not work and was harmful. He added that it was important to respect the wishes of patients who asked for the therapy. Socially-conservative Christian groups such as

Anglican Mainstream and Christian Concern For Our Nation (CCFON) have organised conferences in London in the last two years in support of conversion therapy drawing on practices used in the US, where such therapy is sadly, far more common than in Britain.





# Landmark asylum decision

The Supreme Court issued a ruling that may well be beneficial to lesbian and gay Christians from Africa and the Caribbean who are looking for Changing Attitude's support in seeking asylum. The court ruled that two gay men, from Iran and Cameroon, have the right to asylum in the UK. The pair took their cases to the court after being told by the Home Office they could safely return home if they were "discreet" about their sexual orientation.

The Cameroonian man, HT, argued he was told he could be sent home despite being attacked after he was seen kissing his partner. The Iranian man, HJ, was told by a tribunal that he must expect persecution for his homosexuality and could avoid it by being discreet.

Lord Hope, who read out the judgment, said: "To compel a homosexual person to pretend that his sexuality does not exist or suppress the behaviour by which to manifest itself is to deny him the fundamental right to be who he is." This ruling reverses an earlier Court of Appeal decision that said the government could return the pair to their home countries on the basis that they could be discreet, despite homosexuality being illegal in both countries and HT suffering violence from his neighbours.



Members of the Supreme Court

Changing Attitude believes that no LGBT person should be expected to construct a false identity to pass as 'straight' in homophobic societies. This may have been normative for many in the UK prior to the 1960s but we now recognise the damaging effect on individuals of denying your sexuality. The court's judgment said that the term "concealment" was preferred to discretion, as this recognises that gay people in homophobic countries may need to be dishonest about their sexuality and that the average person would find it intolerable to have to conceal their sexuality for fear of persecution. It added that UK authorities must consider whether asylum applicants have to conceal their sexuality at home for fear of persecution and if so, they should be given refugee status regardless of whether they can successfully keep their sexuality secret.



The Home Secretary Theresa May said the coalition government had already promised to stop the removal of asylum-seekers who have had to leave particular countries because their sexual orientation or gender identification puts them at proven risk of imprisonment, torture, or execution. She added: "I do not believe it is acceptable to send people home and expect them to hide their sexuality to avoid persecution. We will, of course, take any decisions on a case-by-case basis looking at the situation in the country of origin and the merits of individual cases in line with our commitment."

## South Africa releases guidelines on same-sex unions

The House of Bishops of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa released draft guidelines on same-sex unions in October, asking the Church's twenty-five dioceses to discuss the proposals and report back to the bishops' spring meeting. The guidance has been drafted in response to pastoral situations that are arising within parishes as a consequence of Civil Union legislation in South Africa.



Details of the proposals have not yet been made public but are understood to try to accommodate the church's traditional stance on marriage with the pastoral needs of church members in civil same-sex unions.

The Southern African church is the most theologically diverse of all the African provinces of the Anglican Communion and its bishops are not of one mind on the issues of human sexuality.

## Irish parliament approves civil partnerships bill

Irish politicians have passed a bill granting gay and lesbian couples the right to civil partnerships. The bill passed in the Dail without a vote and justice minister, Dermot Ahern, said the move reflected change in Irish society.

Irish gay campaigners welcomed the bill's progress but reiterated concerns that some areas of the law were not covered. Kieran Rose, the chair of the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network said: "A continuing area of concern for GLEN, however, is the absence in the bill of support and recognition of the many children being parented by same-sex couples. This critical omission will have to be addressed."

The rights which the bill will give include protections and obligations across areas such as protection of the couple's shared home, domestic violence, residential tenancies, succession, refugee law, pensions, taxation, social welfare, and immigration. The bill is expected to become law in the autumn, seventeen years after Ireland decriminalised homosexuality.

## New Archbishop of Rwanda vows to campaign for reform

The new Archbishop of Rwanda, the Most Rev Onesphore Rwaje, has vowed to carry on the policies of his predecessor, Archbishop Emmanuel Kolini, and push for the reform of the Anglican Communion.



In an interview with the *New Times* of Kigali published in October, the new Archbishop, who will take office in January, said he would hold fast to the church's traditional teachings on human sexuality. "Anything that is contrary to God's family set-up is not acceptable; there is nowhere in the Bible where same-sex marriage is encouraged. God created a man and woman to be the basis of a family," the Archbishop said.

The Anglican Church of Rwanda claims to have been at the forefront of the reform movement within the Anglican Communion. While it supports in principle the Archbishop of Canterbury's Anglican Covenant process it has been less than enthusiastic about how such a structure might work, given what a press release described as the anarchy now prevalent across the Communion.



"Religion is a big help whenever I have doubts about my homophobia."

## Rolling Stone paper in Uganda publishes photos of gays and incites lynching

Five days before the first anniversary of the publication of Bahati's lethal anti-gay bill in Uganda, Rolling Stone, a newly-published newspaper headlined its front-page story "100 pictures of Uganda's top homos leak", with a bright yellow banner across it that read: "Hang Them." Alongside their photos were the men's names and addresses. The article claimed that an unknown but deadly disease was attacking homosexuals in Uganda and said that gays were recruiting one million children by raiding schools, a common smear used in Uganda.

Bishop Christopher Ssenyonjo's picture was featured on the front page. Bishop Christopher, who is heterosexual, was a member of the Inclusive Church team at the Lambeth Conference in 2008 and has just completed a speaking tour of the USA. He has been repeatedly vilified by the Church of Uganda because of his support for LGBT people.

In the days following publication, at least four gay Ugandans on the list were attacked and many others went into hiding, according to rights activist Julian Onziema. One person named in the story had stones thrown at his house by neighbours.

"Before the introduction of the bill in parliament most people did not mind about our activities. But since then, we are harassed by many people who hate homosexuality," said Patrick Ndede. "The publicity the bill got made many people come to know about us and they started mistreating us."

More than twenty homosexuals have been attacked over the last year in Uganda and an additional seventeen have been arrested and are in prison, said Frank Mugisha, the chairman of Sexual Minorities Uganda. Those numbers are up from the same period two years ago, when about ten homosexuals were attacked, he said.

Solomon Male, a pastor and the head of a group of clergy in Uganda, said he is glad the anti-homosexual bill has not yet passed but said there needs to be an investigation to find out "why homosexuality is increasing in the country."



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